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## Guilt by Association? Thank God for Freedom of Association!

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### Obituary

**Wolfgang Wagner, Opera director.  
Born Bayreuth, Germany, August 30, 1919.  
Died Bayreuth, March 21, Aged 90.**



## Wagner's grandson dies

March 23, 2010



**Wolfgang Wagner devoted his entire life to the legacy of his famous grandfather. -- PHOTO: AP**  
BERLIN - WOLFGANG Wagner, a grandson of German composer Richard Wagner, who carried the torch of the family's musical legacy, has died at age 90.  
For 57 years since 1951, Wagner directed the annual Bayreuth Festival in the southern state of Bavaria. He worked initially alongside his brother, Wieland Wagner, until his death in 1966.  
'Wolfgang Wagner devoted his entire life to the legacy of his famous grandfather,' the festival said in a statement after his death on Sunday. The festival, also known as the Richard Wagner Festival, dates back to 1876 and consists of opera performances such as *Tristan und Isolde* composed in the 19th century.  
Wolfgang Wagner was born in 1919 in Bayreuth, Germany, the third child of Siegfried and Winifred Wagner. He and his brother resurrected the Bayreuth Festival in 1951, after a war court removed Winifred, a Nazi supporter, from her position as head.  
Following his brother's death, Wagner continued to administer the festival, but handed over production of the operas to a number of well-known, experimental directors, which has helped keep the festival fresh over the years.  
Since then, Wagner had worked with directors Goetz Friedrich of the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Sir Peter Hall of the Royal Shakespeare Company and Heiner Mueller of the Berliner Ensemble. – REUTERS,  
[http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/Lifestyle/Story/STIStory\\_505386.html](http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/Lifestyle/Story/STIStory_505386.html)

## Wagner scion lived down his Nazi past

*The Australian*, 24 March 2010

That's the headline in *The Australian*, typifying its anti-German stance. The original article, as published in *The Times*, had this headline:

## Wolfgang Wagner: director of the Bayreuth Festival Opera

*The Times*, March 23, 2010



Wagner in 1976: his stagecraft was old-fashioned and somewhat stodgy but he also presided over a number of modernistic interpretations of note (Ullstein Bild/TopFoto/ArenaPAL)

Genius rarely passes down more than two generations. Artistic dynasties are mostly short-lived and they are all too often riven by internecine feuding. If nothing else, "the Wagners of Bayreuth" at least disprove the generalisation about short-lived dynasties: the Festival Opera has been in the hands of the same family since Richard Wagner laid the foundation stone of the Festspielhaus in 1872. And, in partnership or alone, Wolfgang Wagner ran the festival for well over half a century.

At the same time, the family, the "House of Atreus" beloved of German journalism, became ever more a byword for envenomed squabbles. Wolfgang played more than his share in these, quarrelling with his siblings and his children to a degree that overshadowed his reputation as an artistic administrator and what was a more tenuous reputation as an opera producer.

It was eerie enough that, as the 21st century approached, audiences at Bayreuth would hear announcements made on stage in an exaggerated Franconian accent by a man whose grandfather had been born little more than a decade after the 18th century ended. Richard Wagner was born in 1813 in Leipzig, almost within earshot of the Battle of Nations, which preceded Waterloo by two years.

By 1869 he had stolen Cosima, Liszt's daughter and Hans von Bülow's wife, from her husband and begotten a son, Siegfried, born that year. The family settled at Bayreuth in Franconia, where Wagner built a great theatre as a temple to his art where his operas would be given each summer ever after.

Cosima took over at Wagner's death in 1883, and Siegfried took over from his imperious mother in 1906. He was himself a composer of some gifts, but inevitably lived in the huge shadow of his father. Despite his adventurous homosexuality, Siegfried was married to Winifred Williams Klindworth, daughter of a Welsh father adopted by Germans, and had two girls and two boys.

Born in 1917 and 1919, Wieland and Wolfgang grew up and were educated in Bayreuth. Their father died in 1930, when Winifred took charge of the festival. She had already become close friends with him whom the boys knew as the avuncular "Wolf", Adolf Hitler; almost uniquely, the family could "sich duzen" or use the intimate form of "you" with him.

Having joined the National Socialist party early, Winifred remained — "with typical Welsh obstinacy", as Wolfgang quaintly put it — until her death in 1980 an impertinent Nazi in outlook. She never apologised for her hero, and inscribed letters to friends "88" (from the eighth letter of the alphabet "HH", sc. "Heil Hitler").

Although Wolfgang would try to distance Bayreuth from the terrible legacy of the Third Reich, his later account of that period was self-serving and even bizarre. He claimed that — according to an amusing story his family knew — a group of prominent Jews had been to the Führer and told him, "Herr Hitler, open up the party to us Jews and you'll have no problems of any kind." The Wagner family were not only indignant about Kristallnacht in 1938, he insisted, but also accepted Hitler's explanation that it had been "an

independent initiative on Goebbels's part and had come as a surprise to him".

In 1939 Wolfgang joined the army and served in the Polish campaign, where he was wounded and invalided out; he did not later dwell on the fact that Hitler had sent him flowers in hospital. He spent the rest of the war years studying theatre, and taking the first steps in his career during the strange, unreal period in Germany when the bands played on amid the carnage.

Bayreuth had become a spiritual centre of the New Order, and when the war ended it seemed to epitomise a nation's physical and moral ruin. The family home had been bombed, and the Festspielhaus on the sacred Green Hill now staged light entertainment for GIs. Winifred appeared before a deNazification court and was forbidden ever again to take part in the festival.

Even without her, its future seemed most problematical in the late 1940s. Nevertheless, it was reopened in 1951 as "New Bayreuth", Richard Wagner not merely represented but reinvented, plausibly or not, as an apostle of human brotherhood. The two brothers were joint directors, but it was Wieland who was the creative genius of the pair. Partly for ideological reasons — to play down the Nordic mysticism that the Nazis had appropriated — he revolutionised production of the operas, using expressionistic lighting in place of elaborate sets and costumes.

Until Wieland's early death in 1966, Bayreuth enjoyed a new golden age, but relations between the brothers were never sunny. Later Wolfgang endorsed the opinion of a "close and fatherly friend of mine and my brother's" that "it was a great tragedy that financial necessity should have compelled Wieland, particularly in his later years, to stage so many second-hand copies of his Bayreuth productions at other theatres. This had deprived him of the time and energy to enrich his artistic endeavours in respect of our grandfather's work." Doubtless this was partly in reaction to almost universal critical opinion, which was as tepid about the younger brother's work as producer as it had been enthusiastic about the elder's. The disparagement was absurd, but the tepidity may have been a little unfair. Wolfgang's productions were not all contemptible, and their old-fashioned stagecraft had something to be said for it. Beginning with *Der fliegende Holländer* in 1955 and *Tannhäuser* in 1957, he produced over four decades the full canon of mature Wagner operas that is Bayreuth's repertory. In the case of *Lohengrin*, *Die Meistersinger*, *Parsifal* and the *Ring* cycle, he produced them twice. Some of these were stodgy by contemporary standards, but they had at least the merit of not entirely ignoring the libretto as written.

Almost by way of overcompensation, Bayreuth under Wolfgang's direction provided several modernistic productions of varying merit; among them the French producer Patrice Chéreau's 1976 centennial *Ring*, which at any rate divided opinion. It was succeeded by the "English *Ring*" of 1983, conducted by Sir Georg Solti and produced by Sir Peter Hall.

This was not a success, but nor was it the total failure that Wolfgang characteristically called it, blaming Solti's vanity and Hall's ignorance of German, along with his concept of the work, which "helped in its maladroit way to provoke disastrous repercussions". But then Wolfgang never blamed himself for productions that went awry under his direction of the festival.

The Solti-Hall cycle was succeeded by a visually stunning production by the East German producer Harry Kupfer, conducted by Daniel Barenboim and featuring a strong British contingent led by John Tomlinson's Wotan and Anne Evans's Brünnhilde. It was arguably the last great *Ring* cycle to be seen at Bayreuth and survives along with the Chéreau and a segment of a later, somewhat uneven production by Alfred Kirchner on the various videos and DVDs that were issued with Wolfgang's imprimatur.

Meantime, the family dramas continued, increasingly a lurid soap opera, not so much *Atreus* as *Dallas*. Wolfgang complicated the family plot further by his marriages. By his first wife, Ellen, he had two children, Eva, who has worked for the Royal Opera and other opera houses, and Gottfried. The latter became a thorn in his father's flesh, producing opera from time to time, but also giving lectures on the evils of Richard Wagner's ideology. He also published his own version of events, *Wer nicht mit dem Wolf heult* (He who does not howl with the wolf), as did Wieland's sister Friedelind (*Nacht über Bayreuth*, Night over Bayreuth). Both are useful correctives to Wolfgang's own autobiography, *Lebens-Akte* of 1994.

Matters eventually and inevitably came to a head during the last decade. For years Wolfgang had maintained that his second wife, Gudrun, was his only suitable successor, but after her unexpected death in 2007 he was forced to cede the reins of the festival jointly to his daughters, Eva (from his first marriage) and Katharina (from his second). He finally relinquished the position in 2008, having survived long enough to witness at Bayreuth Katharina's controversial, postmodern production of *Die Meistersinger*, a taster, it would seem, for things to come.

Wolfgang Wagner was married, first, to Ellen Drexel in 1942. After divorcing her, he was married to his assistant, Gudrun Mack, in 1976. But his elder children had "unfortunately been prompted", as he put it, "to give increasing vent to their aversions" towards their father and stepmother". Wolfgang also contemptuously dismissed his nephew Wolf-Siegfried Wagner, who has had a chequered career of his own in opera. "Despite all the loving care lavished on him," he "had been a considerable source of worry to his father" (Wieland, that is, who was no longer in a position to deny this).

**Wolfgang Wagner, co-director of the Bayreuth Festival Opera, 1951-66, and sole director, 1966-2008, was born on August 30, 1919. He died on March 21, 2010, aged 90**

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/obituaries/article7071604.ece>

**Fredrick Töben digs deep into Adelaide Institute's archive and finds some of his writings...**



## Wagner's Ring cycle

### *Götterdämmerung-Twilight of the Gods – The Third Day*

Sunday, 12 December 2004

**Someone said that a \$1200 ticket would have got me to see over 200 movies. I didn't pay that to get entertained but I came to be enthralled by the story.**

#### Act 1

With the rise of the curtain the visual impact of that which binds past, present and future captures the audience. The fascination of the ultraviolet fluorescence depicting the rope is a simple but brilliant use of technology.

However, the three Norns spinning the rope of world knowledge visually did not satisfy because they were dressed in swimsuits and suggestive shaved heads. The breaking of the rope did not clearly symbolise the imminent tragedy, something that would have been achieved had the visual representation of the Norns reflected the seriousness of their job.

Combined with Siegfried's prancing and tripping around with an umbrella the seriousness of the situation is lost to the audience, some of whom sniggered in response to the visuals.

Asher Fisch's work in the orchestra pit, again, saved it all. Brünnhilde figuratively towers over Siegfried during their passionate love scene with a voice that would make Martha Mödel proud. From there on Siegfried fades into his Rhine adventures.

It is totally inappropriate to depict Gutrune wearing callipers because by handicapping her thus the director fails to capture the tension of infidelity for which, according to the music, no excuses are acceptable.

Siegfried's excuse in the form of the magic potion, given to him by a scheming and intriguing but vocally superb Hagen, to forget his vow to Brünnhilde is somewhat justified by presenting Gutrune so unattractively.

Brünnhilde passionately re-affirms her love for Siegfried as she rejects Waltraut's plea. Siegfried uses the Tarnhelm to disguise himself as Gunther and takes unwilling Brünnhilde back with him to Gibichung. Whether the violent depiction of this scene was necessary and enhancing the action is questionable. It certainly illustrates director Neidhardt's value system that seems to portray the vulgarities of our societies, rather than accentuating or inferring therefrom the subtleties of human relationships. This literalism is visually harsh but once again Wagner's music overrides such vulgarities.

Unfortunately Siegfried's voice fails to convey the passion of this tragic scene.

Interestingly, Gunther and his men are dressed in camouflage uniform wearing a red beret. As they enter, a few wore the blindfolding hoods that reminded me of what the US forces have been doing to Iraqi prisoners – acts of humiliation. In Act III we see Hagen kill Gunther in a fight

over the ring, and his men, dressed in suits taking Gunther's men prisoners.

#### Act II

The orchestra's richness evokes once more the power of the Ring.

Alberich beseeches his son, Hagen, to get him that ring. Brünnhilde notices that Siegfried is wearing her Ring and thus realizing her betrayal she lashes out and seeks Siegfried's death. Siegfried falls into Hagen's trap and fails to extricate himself therefrom, and he will kill Siegfried.

#### Act III

The music at the beginning of this act sums up the whole *Ring* by evoking the essential motifs, especially in the re-emergence of the Rhine maidens.

With all the intrigues re-emerging, from the Rhine Maidens, to Hagen giving Siegfried an antidote for his poison, from Gunther feeling betrayed and Siegfried outraged at being duped – letting himself be duped! – it is clear that Siegfried in reality is feeling guilty at having betrayed Brünnhilde's passionate love.

Siegfried's death is portrayed like a military funeral where the coffin is flag draped and soldiers carry it off, befitting a so-called hero.

Brünnhilde, overcome with remorse, takes the Ring and follows Siegfried in the hope that the Ring's curse is thereby destroyed.

The gas flame re-ignites as a line across the stage, then the water curtain falls, and Brünnhilde runs backstage through the flames, and the stage is filled with a warm glow – a most effective way of staging the finale that destroys Valhalla. And then the curtain forever closed the third Adelaide 2004 *Ring* cycle.

This story understood as a morality play will make the action not seem trivial. Those who cannot tolerate a *Gesamtkunstwerk* find the story line uninspiring and quite lacking in dramatic intensity. Wagner here is saying that there is no excuse for betrayal, and this thought Wagner augments musically. As chemicals and vibrations make up the primordial stuff in this world, the human brain still responds to such elementary stimulants. Wagner's music cuts right down to these basic recesses in our mind – and that is perhaps what is meant when we say that Wagner robbed music of its innocence by overlaying it with a moral message.

In 1998 Andrew Gray raised the question of why nowhere in the world has Wagner's *Ring* received any critical attention in any university drama departments. His answer was that Wagner's work presents too much of a challenge for those handicapped, in particular by political correctness.

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### **An archetypal awakening:**

**Fredrick Töben loves the groupies' Guilt by Association**

**A devotee from another scene discovers Richard Wagner's *Der Ring Des Nibelungen*, thus making the connection between music and the elementary chemical and vibrations in his body and brain.**





**Senior Groupie Moments At The Cast Party – Festival Centre Sunday, 12 December 2004**



**And here is Fredrick Töben with Wolfgang Wagner on 26 March 1998**

**Germany clears Nazi-era 'traitors'**  
**From correspondents in Berlin, AFP, September 09, 2009**

THE German parliament voted overnight to lift Nazi-era convictions of wartime "traitors" whose names, 70 years after the fighting started, had still not been cleared.

The law passed the Bundestag lower house with the support of all five parties in parliament and marked the culmination of a decades-long fight for justice on behalf of those who turned their backs on Hitler's forces.

"It took far too long," deputy Wolfgang Wieland of the Green party told the chamber, apologising to a campaigner for the bill, 87-year-old Ludwig Baumann, who attended the vote at the Reichstag parliament building.

"Many of his comrades are dead and never lived to witness their rehabilitation," Mr Wieland told deputies.

Just a week after solemn commemorations to mark the start of World War II on September 1, 1939 with the German invasion of Poland, MPs finally closed the book on what campaigners called an enduring injustice.

"To turn one's back on such a war - was that not the better choice than to follow orders to the end?" Mr Wieland said.

"That is the decisive question."

Nazi military tribunals sentenced some 30,000 people to death for desertion or treason during the war, of whom 20,000 were executed, according to historians whose work was cited in the bill.

Around 100,000 men were sentenced to prison. The victims were not only Germans but also citizens of Austria, Denmark, Norway, Romania and Luxembourg.

All who survived had a criminal record, often could not find jobs in the postwar years and even faced death threats for their "betrayal of the Fatherland".

In 2002, parliament wiped the convictions of conscientious objectors and deserters such as Baumann from the books but not those of "wartime traitors".

These included soldiers, officers and some civilians accused of crimes such as political resistance - even making critical

remarks about the Nazis made in private - or helping persecuted Jews.

Since then, there had been repeated attempts to erase the convictions but no clear majority in parliament.

Conservatives had long opposed an across-the-board rehabilitation, calling for a case-by-case review to determine whether there had been "legitimate" convictions. However a justice ministry review conducted by a former constitutional court judge found that the Nazis' treason law dating from 1934 was a clear instrument of repression, so vague as to be open to capricious rulings.

That report eliminated the remaining opposition to the bill.

Few if any of those convicted but not executed are still alive today.

Mr Baumann founded the German Federation of Victims of National Socialist Military Justice in 1990 and had since then fought an uphill battle to see the records wiped clean.

He narrowly escaped execution for deserting his Wehrmacht company in Bordeaux in 1942 but he endured torture after his capture and was ostracised by his fellow Germans for decades after World War II.

"My dream of seeing all the victims of Nazi justice rehabilitated will have been fulfilled," Mr Baumann said ahead of the vote. "But I will be sad because I will not be able to drink a toast to this success with any of my comrades in suffering."

In Austria, campaigners are still seeking the annulment of the verdicts of the Nazis' military tribunals and the rapid settlement of deserters' claims for aid as victims as well as a national memorial for the deserters. Such a memorial was erected in Cologne, western Germany last week.

<http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/breaking-news/germany-clears-nazi-era-traitors/story-e6frea7u-1225770848430>

### **Bayreuth impresario Wolfgang Wagner dies at 90, *Deutsche Welle* 22.03.2010**



#### ***Wolfgang Wagner directed the Bayreuth Festival for more than half a century***

The long-time director of the famous Bayreuth Festival has died. Wolfgang Wagner, grandson of composer Richard Wagner, passed away on March 21, 2010 in his house in Bayreuth in southern Germany at the age of 90.

Wolfgang Wagner passed away on March 21, 2010 in his house in Bayreuth in southern Germany at the age of ninety. He directed the Bayreuth Festival, the legendary opera event in southern Germany, for 57 years before stepping down in 2008.

Wagner was a stroke of luck for the post-World War II development of the legendary Bayreuth Festival, according to Austrian conductor and long-time participant in the festival, Peter Schneider.

"I once observed how he looked into the pots in the cafeteria kitchen to make sure everything was running smoothly," said Schneider. It was Wolfgang Wagner, the last living grandson of composer Richard Wagner, who transformed the Bayreuth Festival from a private legacy into a successful cultural institution.

#### **Restoring the Wagner name**

But it wasn't an easy path to success. After World War II, Wolfgang Wagner toured Germany on his motorcycle in an effort to recruit sponsors for the reopening of the Bayreuth Festival, which exclusively features operas by Richard Wagner.

"There was a lot of resentment, since my mother had been a friend of Adolf Hitler's," Wolfgang Wagner once said. "Without foreign sponsors, we wouldn't have managed it."

On July 30, 1951, six years after the end of the war, the festival reopened with a premiere of the opera "Parsifal." Wagner co-directed the festival with his elder brother Wieland, until his death in 1966, when Wolfgang took over sole leadership.

As a director, Wolfgang Wagner roused mixed opinions. He was said to be conservative and stood for a long time in his brother's shadow. Still, his extensive practical experience earned him respect: He brought some of the world's most renowned singers, directors, and conductors to Bayreuth.



But his so-called "workshop" approach to the festival didn't go over well with everyone. Wagner's concept was that opera productions were never finished, but would be honed

to perfection year after year, sometimes with extensive changes. In other houses, productions are simply repeated wholesale over several seasons.



***The Bayreuth Festival site is known as the Green Hill***

Swedish soprano Birgit Nilsson, who frequently performed in Bayreuth, felt that Wagner's workshop model threatened to compromise quality. "People are now talking about the Bayreuth Workshop," she said shortly before she died in 2005. "Any beginner can sing at Bayreuth!"

In addition to his artistic direction, Wagner was closely involved in founding the Richard Wagner Foundation, which actively preserves the composer's estate and the Festspielhaus theater. Wolfgang Wagner was also responsible for the restoration of Richard Wagner's villa, the Wahnfried House, which is now a museum.



***Katharina Wagner, 31, is an accomplished stage director***

#### **Changing of the guard**

Family quarrels have plagued the Wagner clan since 1999, when the process for determining a successor to Wolfgang began. The impresario's second wife Gudrun was considered a likely candidate for the position, but when she died suddenly in November 2007, the door was opened for Wagner's two daughters Eva and Katharina to take the helm.

On September 1, 2008, the Bayreuth Festival foundation board approved the joint leadership of the two half-sisters. That marked the beginning of a new era in Bayreuth. They have begun by setting a more youthful tone in the artistic programming and placing greater emphasis on publicity and

communication. But exactly where the young Wagners will take the festival is yet to be seen.

Wolfgang Wagner's health had declined since 2007 and since then he largely withdrew from the media and from his remaining involvement in the direction of the festival. He celebrated his 90th birthday last summer quietly, surrounded by his family. For the first time since 1951, he was no longer in the limelight.

Author: Dieter David-Scholz (kjb)

Editor: Ben Knight

<http://www.dwworld.de/dw/article/0,,5378366,00.html>

## **Wolfgang Wagner, Director of Bayreuth, Is Dead at 90**

By **MARGALIT FOX**, Published: March 23, 2010

Life in the eye of a Wagnerian storm

MARGALIT FOX, March 27, 2010

**WOLFGANG MANFRED MARTIN WAGNER**  
**OPERA IMPRESARIO, DIRECTOR**

**The death was announced on the festival's Web site, which gave few details**

<http://www.bayreuther-festspiele.de/>

Founded in the 1870s to stage Richard Wagner's work, Bayreuth is today one of the world's most luminary summer music festivals. Wolfgang Wagner was at its helm from 1951 until 2008, when he grudgingly retired.



**Wolfgang Wagner in 1998 at Bayreuth, the opera festival conceived by his grandfather.**

**Pic. Frank Boxler/Associated Press**

His retirement was preceded by nearly a decade of fighting over succession. Would Bayreuth's new leader be Mr. Wagner's second wife? His estranged daughter from his first marriage? His niece, the author of a bitter family biography? Or the glamorous young daughter from his second marriage, who in 2007 directed a "Meistersinger" at Bayreuth that featured, The New York Times reported, "topless dancers, full male nudity, plastic phalluses and a bizarre auto-da-fé"?

Mr. Wagner was considered an able administrator if a rather stolid opera director. (In 2001, The New Criterion called him the "supremely less talented" of Siegfried Wagner's two sons.) Over the decades, he was described variously as a savior and a dictator.

On the one hand, his supporters argued, he helped dispel the shadow of Nazism that hung over Bayreuth and freshened hidebound productions by bringing in outside directors. On the other, said his detractors — several were members of his own family — he was an autocrat who turned the festival into his personal fief.

In a condolence letter that was released to the news media, Chancellor [Angela Merkel](#) of Germany called Mr. Wagner an "exceptional director." By contrast, as The Independent of London reported in 2001, the Bavarian culture minister once called him an "old goat."

Throughout Wolfgang Wagner's career, there were also lingering public questions about the extent to which he had broken with his family's Nazi past. Many of them were raised by Mr. Wagner's son, Gottfried, in his own bitter family biography.

If Mr. Wagner's story — with its attendant arguments, pronouncements, banishments and estrangements — is the stuff of high drama, then it is as drama that it is fittingly told, with a cast of characters that includes these:

¶ Richard Wagner (1813-83), paterfamilias. Opened the Bayreuth Festival Theater in 1876.

¶ Cosima Wagner (1837-1930), [Franz Liszt's](#) daughter and Richard Wagner's second wife.

¶ Siegfried Wagner (1869-1930), son of Richard and Cosima.

¶ Winifred Wagner (1897-1980), Siegfried's wife.

¶ Wieland Wagner (1917-1966), elder son of Siegfried and Winifred.

¶ Wolfgang Wagner (born Wolfgang Manfred Martin Wagner in Bayreuth on Aug. 30, 1919), younger son of Siegfried and Winifred.

The drama opened in the 19th century, when Richard Wagner, the composer of "Lohengrin," "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg" and the Ring cycle, among other works, became a major force in world opera. After his death, Cosima assumed control of Bayreuth. Siegfried succeeded her in the early 20th century.

In 1915, Siegfried, in his mid-40s and openly gay, married the English-born Winifred Williams, 18. On his death, she took over the festival. An ardent anti-Semite, Winifred maintained a close friendship with [Hitler](#), who visited Bayreuth often. (She was reported to have given Hitler the writing paper on which he composed "Mein Kampf.") As a boy, Wolfgang studied music privately in Bayreuth and later studied theater in Berlin.

In 1939, after enlisting in the German Army, Wolfgang took part in the invasion of Poland and was wounded. (The invasion, as one of his sisters explained in "The Wagner Family," a documentary shown on British television last year, was planned at Bayreuth using Wolfgang's geography textbook.)

After the war, Bayreuth needed to shed its Nazi image. In 1951, the festival reopened, de-Nazified, with Wieland and Wolfgang as joint directors. Their mother, an unreconstructed Nazi sympathizer, was banished from the opera house. Wieland's productions, known for their avant-garde minimalism, were widely praised. Wolfgang's, including a 1953 "Lohengrin," were more conventional and less well received.

On Wieland's death in 1966, Wolfgang became Bayreuth's sole artistic director. Though he continued to stage operas himself, he was also noted for bringing in world-class foreign directors — the first from outside the family — among them the theater director Patrice Chéreau and the conductor [Daniel Barenboim](#), who is Jewish.

As the century drew to a close, rumblings about succession began in earnest. Mr. Wagner championed his second wife, Gudrun, whom he married in 1976. Another claimant was Eva Wagner-Pasquier, his estranged daughter from his first marriage. (Eva was banished after Mr. Wagner divorced his first wife, Ellen Drexel, to marry Gudrun. In an interview with *The Financial Times* in 2000, she called her father "a little dictator.")

Also clamoring to run Bayreuth was Nike Wagner, Wieland's daughter. An outspoken critic of her uncle, she was long since banished; her caustic book, "The Wagners: The Dramas of a Musical Dynasty" (Weidenfeld & Nicolson; translated by Ewald Osers and Michael Downes), appeared in 2000.

A third candidate was Katharina Wagner, Wolfgang's daughter by Gudrun, to whom he shifted his allegiance after Gudrun's death in 2007. Her partly naked "Meistersinger," widely seen as her audition for the job, was booed by many in Bayreuth's audience.

Not in contention was a son, Gottfried, from Mr. Wagner's first marriage. After the publication of his book, which questioned the degree to which his father had repudiated the family's Nazi past, Gottfried was banished. The book appeared in English in 1999 as "Twilight of the Wagners :



*The Unveiling of a Family's Legacy*" (Picador USA; translated by Della Couling).

Mr. Wagner's survivors include his children, Gottfried, Eva and Katharina; a sister, Verena; and grandchildren.

In 2008, Bayreuth announced the appointment of Eva and Katharina — half-sisters more than three decades apart in

age — as the festival's co-directors. In keeping with longstanding family tradition, they had not spoken to each other in many years.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/23/arts/music/23wagner.html?partner=rss&emc=rss>

## **ERRORS, LIES AND NONSENSE ABOUT WAGNER**

**Andrew Gray delivered this talk at Adelaide Institute's International Revisionist Symposium, 9 August 1998.**

**His translation of Richard Wagner's autobiography *Mein Leben – My Life*, is still in print. [Someone stole FT's autographed copy in 1999.]**

**From No 84, *Adelaide Institute Online*, December 1998**

Nobody blames Lenin on Tolstoy - and they were contemporaries. I think Lenin was 40 years old when Tolstoy died in 1910, and Tolstoy's later ruminations on collectivism in the latter stages of his life were useful to Lenin, who adored him when putting together those doctrines, or whatever one wants to call them, which resulted in Stalin's Leninism. But an entire world industry blames Hitler on Richard Wagner, and Wagner died six years before Hitler was born.

It's very difficult to characterise the fatuity of such a debate, discussion, 'Geplapper', or whatever. The Germans have also the term 'Geschwafel'. The German language has wonderful words for this kind of thing, but whatever it is, it is world-wide. It goes on and on and on, and as we speak here another symposium is taking place. And it's taking place in Bayreuth under the Schirmherrschaft des Bundespräsidenten, Dr Roman Herzog, and it's called "Wagner und die Juden". It's taking place over a series of five days, from the 6th to the 11th. We Revisionists are much more modest.

I'll just read you this from the fourth day of this interminable stream of guff, I'll read you some of the titles of the lectures. Professors have turned up from all over the world but the two main ones are from Tel Aviv University and the University of Heidelberg. And here are some of the titles that they are discussing right now:

Professor David S Katz is discussing "Wagner, the Jews and the Occult Tradition". I mean, you may just as well be discussing his dogs, for that matter. Professor Rudolf Behrenbach is discussing "Anti-Semitism als ästhetisches Program" — anti-Semitism as aesthetic doctrine. Professor David Lange is lecturing on "A mirror of the Master. The Racial Theories of Houston Stewart Chamberlain". Professor Paul L. Rose is lecturing—this is on the final day now—"Wagner and Hitler after the Holocaust". Dr Dina Porac of Tel Aviv University is lecturing on "The Impact of Wagner's Concepts on the Nazi Movement". This is on the fifth day. By this time they must be glassy eyed. Even a friend of mine is lecturing. They've given him the time of 8.45 in the evening. He's lecturing on "Thomas Mann, Wagner and the Jews". If anybody at 8.45 pm is either sober or awake, it will absolutely be amazing. And the last one, the final word, will be by Dr Lana Sheshik, who is going to lecture on "Wagner-Israel, from the ban to the creation of a symbol, 1938 to 1997".

Well, there seems to be almost no end to it, but the one subject they fail to touch upon is Wagner himself. They deny it. I mean, that is what's completely lost in this unthinking and this monumental detour around the subject which they make.

There was in circulation in the 1920s an old League of Nations anecdote. It's partly apocryphal but it's apropos. Elephants were an endangered species in the 1920s. There was a League of Nations commission founded to look into it. It was a multi-national committee, and it had each member looking at some specific aspect of the elephant problem. The Frenchman supposedly took the elephant and the reproductive cycle. The Englishman took the ivory trade and its implications. But the longest of all disquisitions was by a Pole who reported on 'The Elephant and the Polish Question'.

You can always take a subject and get it by the tail. One can always indulge in some kind of subject completely self-referentially, and of course that is what has happened here. It is true that you can say Wagner was concerned in his life about virtually every conceivable problematic aspect of the civilization. Any kind of problem - vivisection was such a general problem. He didn't like cruelty to animals. Any single aspect of civilisation was a problem and captured his attention.

He certainly didn't like newspapers and he saw horrible dangers in journalism. I mean his genius was anticipatory in so many respects but I think he saw the age of the mass media coming, and he found the German newspapers of his time completely and totally irresponsible with respect to his own art, which they in fact were. But one of the things that Wagner research does now is to go back and look at the evidence. That at least is something - go back and see what actually was written...

From the time he got back to Germany from Paris in 1842, and from the minute he set foot in Dresden and began to announce himself, with what Bülow later called Meyerbeer's best opera - Rienzi - from this new beginning, he encountered a kind of massive distortion, hostility and really gratuitous insults in the public press.

It was bound to upset him sooner or later. I mean, this sort of thing is bound to upset anybody and it seemed to be from his standpoint the one thing the critics would not do was address themselves to the works of art themselves.

Then, you know, came Tannhäuser. 'Oh, it's Catholic propaganda', unbelievable nonsense from day one. He looked at the mass media, at these papers, and he saw great danger in this. And by the 1850s it occurred to him that there was a Jewish presence among the music journalism of the time - and there is no question that there was.

In going into Wagner's biography it is of course terribly dangerous to say anything in public categorically because the likelihood of error is enormous. In his life we have it year by year for the first 25 years, but then we have it month by month. By the time he gets to Dresden, we've got

it week by week and by the time he gets to Zürich in his years of Swiss exile, we've got it pretty much day by day. That's the kind of scholarship that's gone into this and by the time Cosima starts keeping her diary it is hour by hour. So the manner in which people write casually on the subject never ceases to amaze me because of the primary documents are all there. 5,000 letters, and there is now under way a publication of every letter he ever wrote. They're now at Volume 9 which takes you to the year 1857. There will be 30 volumes that will not be completed during my life-time. That's the kind of dimension of scholarship that goes on - and all this editing, every last letter is still annotated. So if you talk about Wagner casually there is trouble, you'll be in the soup very quickly.

Nevertheless, I will make a guess concerning the first real stage of his resentment which then took form in this polemic for which he was never forgiven - *Das Judentum in der Musik*. It came from his inability to get Tannhäuser performed in Berlin.

Tannhäuser had its premiere in September in Dresden in 1845. I'm sure most people know this work. It's one of the great gifts to German opera. It's to the Germans what *La Traviata* is to the Italians. I mean, he gave them the most German of his works. You could not give a greater gift than what he gave, and what he did for mediaeval Germany. If you go to the Wartburg today, you can see the second act of Tannhäuser, right there physically to look at. And it's difficult to understand why he could not get this opera accepted, really...

Why was Berlin so important? The reason was that it was the only German theatre that paid royalties. The German system prior to 1870 was tilted against independent artists and composers because what the court theatres would do would give you a lump sum payment for all rights permanently. The lump sum payment that Wagner would get for say Tannhäuser from the Royal Court Theatre in Hannover was 2,000 florins, let's say. It would be equivalent to \$4,000 but nothing on which you could base an existence. Nothing on which you could buy or build a house of any kind. You know, Wagner did not have a roof to call his own over his head until he was nearly 60 years old. These are just facts, and if after creating works that have been the centre of the lyric stage ever since, and he managed to become a little bitter about money - think of the system. Verdi was a wealthy man by the time he was 50.

The rules were different. He was blocked. He did blame Meyerbeer, the Berlin court theatre. Meyerbeer controlled the northern European stage. The Paris Opera was in Meyerbeer's hands. These operas were the central money makers, the central core of the repertoire of the time. They have more or less vanished from the theatre of today. It's hard for us to remember how dominant they were. And Meyerbeer - Wagner concluded it was Meyerbeer who was blocking the path intentionally. Well, the evidence for this is very mixed because Meyerbeer was terribly careful where Wagner was concerned and there is no smoking-gun tape in which Meyerbeer said, "I don't want that bastard's operas performed here". Nothing of that kind, nothing.

Nonetheless, he ran up against a stone wall in the Berliner Intendantz, year after year in 1846, 1847. I mean, he did manage to get *Rienzi* performed there - by that time he regarded it a 'Jugendsünde' - a sin of my youth. It was one of the reasons for his own money troubles and his own

desperation which led him to participate in the Dresden uprising of 1849.

In the autobiography he was wonderfully candid, almost across the board. It's a very accurate work. It's often termed as 'here's Wagner spinning tales', this and that. No, no. It is an extremely accurate work, except for two matters in which he is less than candid. One is the extent of his participation in the Dresden uprising. I mean, he makes it appear in his autobiography as if he were a bystander and a cheer leader, sort of saying 'Go to it, I hope you win', and that sort of thing. But, oh no, no, he was the number 3 man. He was right behind Heubner and Bakunin. Three men led that: Heubner, Bakunin and Richard Wagner. The argument is about the charges against him - if caught he would have been sent to death. He certainly would have been sent to prison and he escaped while Heubner and Bakunin were sent to jail for many years.

There is a biographical question: Did he personally participate in the loading of handgrenades? It's an open question whether he was actually there, filling these projectiles with powder. That's the kind of thing that's disputed. It's very possible he was. I mean, he was not a half-way person. Once he did something, he did it all the way, which is, of course, what got him into trouble with the pamphlet that he tossed off in a couple of days of anger in 1850 having landed in Zürich, penniless and in exile, and looking back at the German musical establishment from which he was then banned. He did write the brochure *Das Judentum in der Musik*. It's often translated as *Judaism in Music*. That's incorrect. 'Das Judentum' is not 'Judaism' - we don't have an English equivalent for 'Das Judentum'.

If you read it, it isn't that bad. What he is not forgiven for is saying by implication that neither Meyerbeer nor Mendelssohn - Mendelssohn, whom he names - would love to write German opera but they can't. Why can't they? Well, because as Jews they don't have the right relationship to the two great roots of music - the liturgical music (the church music), and the folksong. The dual root to a nation's music was folksong and liturgical music. I think he's completely right on that. And he asserted wrongly, as we found, Jews would not be able to compose authentic German music. Occasionally he was wrong. He was wrong on that.

He went on to say, for which he was not forgiven, because it was gratuitous that Jewish liturgical music is without any musical value at all, and added that whatever you hear in a synagogue is a form of gargling. He did write that and again when he got started he was not the kind of man that pulled his punches. The difficulty was, when he came to publish a new edition of his collected prose works in 1869, he insisted, against the advice of Liszt, against the advice of several friends, many of whom were Jewish - Heinrich Porges was Jewish, Karl Tausig was Jewish. Two of his pallbearers were Jewish, for heavens sake! He was not the kind of man who was going to withdraw it. Instead he plunked it into his *Gesammelte Schriften* - and he has not been forgiven for that either. It was a conscious decision. He even equipped it with another preface, a rather self-serving preface and an accompanying letter to Marie Muchanoff. That was typical of him. He was not the kind of man who would back down.

If one were to grab the whole subject by the tail, when you interpret works of art of this kind by stating that they reflect the personal prejudices of the creator, I often felt how grateful we should be there was nobody to take down words

from Shakespeare's last years. We know so little of what Shakespeare said and did, what the man, if indeed he is the man who did write the plays - what kind of casual comments he might have made. I'm sure he excoriated the French.

In his later years, it has to be remembered, Wagner was in very fragile health. He had a very, very severe heart condition and his survival was really Cosima's doing, his wife's doing, who watched him like a hawk. I mean, just to make certain that he wouldn't be upset, he was very irascible anyway. The slightest thing was likely to upset him. She was always there to calm him down. That's why we have Parsifal. That's why we have the Bayreuth Theatre, because she was there in those later years when he was frequently close to death. It would be in the diary: "Richard has a narrow escape today". It was that kind of thing, on many occasions he would be close to death. So some of his writings in his later years and some of the statements that are quoted, are the product of temporary outbursts of irascibility. Which one of us has not at some time said things of this sort about anybody which are either irresponsible or boundlessly exasperated with different things? But these things were then excerpted and taken down and written, 'Wagner says this. This is what Wagner says. Wagner said this about so-and-so'. Not just Jews, on anything. It is entirely ludicrous to excerpt from a gigantic body of documents one line. I'll give you an example of the kind of thing that is excerpted. There was a fire in the Theater an der Wien, a very bad theatre fire, I think about 100 people were burnt to death in the fire - and they were performing Orpheus in die Unterwelt. When this was reported to Wagner, he burst out, "Serves them right for going to hear Offenbach".

You know, he didn't mean that, but this is the kind of thing that went hotly over the wires: "Wagner says they got what they deserve". This kind of thing has been going on for more than a hundred years and I don't know how long it is going to go on. But I think it's got to be said, the Jewish issue is just part of it. It's only a small part of it. I tell you what I think is at stake. Resentment and envy basically is at fault here because the gods did this only once. They'll never again combine that kind of supreme talent of the composer and the supreme talent as a dramatist under one brow, apart from a few other things that he could do. For instance, he was a first class architect.

His supreme gift as a dramatist has baffled academia ever since. I'll bet you at the University of Adelaide they'll have a course of the history of western drama but they won't have Wagner as a dramatist. They don't know where to put him. But he is the legatee of Aeschylus. He, as the dramatist, is the legatee. He is impossible to categorize. The size of his genius - Liszt had a wonderful term: "Richard Wagner ist ein Schädelspaltendes Genie" - "a skull-splitting genius" was what Liszt called him. He was certainly 'Das Jahrhundertgenie'. He certainly was that. We fellow Wagnerians feel he was 'das Jahrtausendgenie'.

The envy, I think, at the tap root of this general uproar - this endless, endless backbiting, this gratuitous malevolence, envy and discomfort is really at the base of it. Resentment, too. He said once to his wife - this comes from the diaries - every two pages there are little asides, she is very good at jotting down his casual remarks. She's a smart woman. She knows when he's said something memorable. On one occasion he said, "I robbed music of its innocence". What did he mean? What he means is what he's never been

forgiven for, of course. He sees that human sexuality pervades music, all the way up to the most sublime realm. In this case he certainly anticipated all of psychiatry, all of Freud, effortlessly.

And second, the works themselves. He's the grand master of the sublime, but into the music is composed, decisively and inextricably a sense that the entire bid for transcendence may be in vain. You see, that's where Der Ring is. I hope you're going to get a good production of it. In an authentic production of the Ring, the fundamental question will be posed right away, and the fundamental question is: is there any transcendental meaning at all, or are we entirely subject to natural law?

What do you see? At the opening of Das Rheingold, you see the natural world in its most innocent stage, the three Rhinemaidens representing the natural world. Subaquarus, they represent the unconscious itself. That's the world before it was penetrated by human reflection and conscious intelligence. There they are, swimming around and notice the first line of Der Ring. This is by a man who is always accused of being much too verbose and going on and on forever, taking up time on things. The whole work begins:

Weia! Waga!

Woge, du Welle!

Walle zur Wiege!

Wagalaweia!

Those are playful sounds the two nouns have crept in - 'Welle' and 'Wiege'. What has happened to the world? Yes, language has entered it. What does it mean? Reflective consciousness has entered it. And guess what? The symbol of reflective consciousness turns up. What is the symbol? Well, it's an ugly dwarf. It's not a very attractive character in its early days. Why is it ugly and why not very attractive? The process by which reflective intelligence came into the world, so far as we know, was not a very clean one. All of this is understood by Wagner long before Darwin published The Origin of the Species. Rheingold was written in 1852.

Now, pay attention to the text, which unfortunately very few stage directors these days do. Take a look at what is said between Alberich and the Rhinemaidens who tease him, of course.

The first thing the Rhinemaidens see is he's clumsy. You see the stage directions - he has problems climbing on the rocks. He's not very agile. He doesn't move very well. What he says to the Rhinemaidens is that it's easy for you - they do it by pure instinct. He's got to learn everything. That's what consciousness does. It compels you to learn to do things that other creatures do instinctively.

But he's turned down by the first of the Rhinemaidens, who represent the natural world and are indifferent to him, just as they are indifferent to Siegfried. The natural world doesn't care about us as individuals. Listen to the music in Götterdämmerung, Act III. That is one of the reasons why it has such enormous emotional force. The stream of time, the river, is entirely indifferent to the hero. Heroes come and go. The river and time remain - it's in the music. Only Wagner could do that!

What else does Alberich say? The first Rhinemaiden turns him down, and Alberich says "I'm glad there's more than one of you because if there was only one of you I wouldn't have much of a chance". What's the meaning of that line? He's accepted the law of probability as governing the world, the natural world, which it does. Probability governs our lives.

It is only when all three Rhinemaidens reject him that it occurs to him, well, the Rhein may move on but its not necessarily going to help him individually - one of nature's horrible truths. And it's only then that the ray of sunlight pierces the flowing water, a musically sensational moment among so many - and illuminates the gold at the base - a large block of raw gold.

And please, directors, please, do what Wagner says. Let the ray of sunlight illuminate the raw gold. Please don't turn it into a municipal water works or something else. Please don't try to have some artificial symbolism of 19th century capitalism. Please do what Wagner asked.

I assume what you're going to get is a very spare, lean production here in Adelaide. But maybe you'll be lucky enough. Maybe they'll pay attention to his stage directions. And Alberich stops transfixed, as does everybody, transfixed by the music. And what does that stand for? Guess what? Reflective intelligence itself is represented by this ray of light on the gold.

The gold is a symbol of many other things besides, and I'm not saying that the anti-capitalist interpretation of Der Ring is wrong. You can take Der Ring as class warfare, but that's not a central part. Reflective consciousness has penetrated - there it is, and what is to be done with it? Well, it occurs to Alberich, 'I can do something with reflective consciousness. Instead of chasing these women who won't pay attention to me, maybe something can be done with the brain itself'. And he steals the gold, and takes the gold and brings it up above the surface. Above the surface, that is a symbol of bringing it into consciousness. He takes it up to his factory in the mountain and forges a ring. It's been said that if a symbol is easily defined verbally, it's not a hell of a good symbol. The 'ring' has so many aspects as a symbol, we'd be here all day. But it certainly does stand for the essence of reflective consciousness.

It's Alberich who puts it to work. It's Alberich's ring. It's Alberich who finds out what you can do with reflective consciousness. What you can do is all kinds of things. You can put your brother to work forging the Tarnhelm, for example. Don't forget that Rheingold was written three years after wire telegraphy had been invented. The electronic age had begun and again Wagner catches this - he knows this. The electronic age is implicit and the Tarnhelm stands for that, doesn't it? Wagner gets the point - it stands for instant transferability - 'Er entführt flugs dich dahin'. He catches all that. The difference is that Mime who can make it, doesn't own it. He can't control it. It is the one who made the ring who controls it.

Well, that's the first scene of Rheingold. We are off to the races for the rest of Der Ring. It just beggars belief that I have to read from people whom I know personally in New York or London, to say nothing of some others that Alberich is a specific Jewish caricature. If you want to believe that you can say "Very like a whale". If that's the way you want to interpret this scene, there's not much point in arguing, is there?

I said that I'd talk about errors, lies and nonsense. Since the errors, lies and nonsense are oceanic, we would certainly be here far too long even to get under the surface, much less to any great depth. I suppose this nonsense will be with us permanently because Wagner raises all the hard questions. No other composer raises as insistently as he does the basic fundamental philosophical questions?

For example, Parsifal, a work that I adore, I do not take as an assertion of the Christian faith at all. I take it as a farewell to transcendence, and the bid for transcendence. I believe that if you look closely and listen, you can see that Wagner leaves the ultimates open. He's much too modest and sensible to say categorically this is the way existence is and this is the way philosophical truth is. It's all open. Finally, everything is speculative, that's the way art is. You can't possibly know what Shakespeare really thought about anything.

You can take Parsifal as a farewell to transcendence, and that we have to consecrate, we have to bless the existence we've got because it's the only one. But you can use it as an affirmation of a divine realm, a realm of being other than the one we have. I don't think the case for this is terribly good, and I think if you listen to the music you will hear he has managed to smuggle into the music the agonizing doubt. What do you think the wound of Amfortes represents?

And the music represents the fatal doubt. It is a question. The question is posed, but I don't think it has any doctrinal interest. Wagner asked all these impossible questions - what is music? What is the relationship of music to society? What is the relationship of music to the other arts? What is the relationship between words and music? - just a simple aesthetic question like that. He posed them, he poses them all. Since his works pose them all, I assume that the controversy is going to go on and on, and I suppose it should. One would hope that sooner or later we'll get away from 'the elephant and the Polish question'.

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**Richard Hornung:** You very enthusiastically affirm Wagner, do you think that Nietzsche is a bit of an aberration when he clearly had a split with Wagner?

AG: Nietzsche certainly adored the man and his own life was one of the great tragedies of the time. Nietzsche had a failed love affair with music which was not successful and he never quite gave up as a composer. The products show, as Wagner said, a modest gift, but nothing that he could place much money upon, and certainly Wagner said, stick to your knitting. Nietzsche was a very self-obsessed person who certainly used Wagner as a foil to define himself. What really happened between them and what Nietzsche said happened is just a day and night difference. The answer is the meeting with Wagner was absolutely crucial for Nietzsche, absolutely fundamentally crucial.

Arthur Butz: I think it was about 10 years ago, English philosopher, Brian McGee, published a little book in which he claims that Wagner was right in his booklet *Das Judentum in der Musik*.

AG: Who would it be? I should know, many people have suggested he's not entirely off base in stating what Meyerbeer represented - Meyerbeer is the Andrew Lloyd Webber of his time. Wagner was vindicated in the artistic ideals he opposed to Meyerbeer's. He won across the board. Again, part of the resentment is that those who criticised him took such a beating. Those who fought on the barricades against him took a horrible beating, and still do. I'm sure there's been a public protest that *Das Judentum in der Musik* is not the kind of brochure other people say. It has nothing to do with a political program of any kind. It has nothing whatever to do with National Socialism, nothing, nothing.